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Official refuses exhumation

By EARL GOLZ

The Dallas County chief medical examiner reversed himself Thursday and said he does not consider an exhumation of the body buried in Lee Harvey Oswald's grave "to be in the public interest and will not order one."

Dr. Charles Petty issued the written statement one day after the Tarrant County district attorney's office indicated it would not oppose an order from Petty for exhumation.

"Additional information that has become available to me since last October and has been published has convinced me that no reasonable doubt exists regarding the identity of the body in the grave under the name of Lee Harvey Oswald," Petty said. "The information is contained within the 15-volume report regarding hearings before the Select Committee on Assassinations of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1979."

Last October Petty revealed that his study of information gathered by English author and lawyer Michael Eddowes convinced him an autopsy should be performed on the body because it "sheds some doubt as to the identity of the individual buried" in Rose Hill Cemetery in Fort Worth.

"THERE ARE SOME THINGS that don't jibe," Petty said at the time. "And I think that it is probably better to answer the question rather than to continue in sheer speculation over a long period of time."

Petty last summer had obtained recently discovered dental X-rays taken of Oswald in 1958, a record that was not available to Dr. Earl Rose, Dallas County medical examiner who performed the 1963 autopsy.

Petty did not specify what additional information he has acquired since last October, but Eddowes' attorney, Jerry Pittman, said he believed it principally involves the opinion of a forensic anthropologist.

The anthropologist, Dr. Clyde C. Snow of Oklahoma City, told the house assassinations committee in 1978 that he and other anthropologists who examined 11 facial photographs taken before, after and during Oswald's stay in Russia "are consistent with the photographs of a single individual."

"OUR CONCLUSIONS WERE that there was no evidence that there was an imposter or a double involved on the basis of what we could measure from the photographs," Snow told the committee.

Pittman said, however, that Snow since 1978 has said he would "encourage all efforts to disinter the body and even suggested a blue ribbon panel of experts from around the country be present at the autopsy. And he said he would be happy to volunteer to serve on that panel.

"So here is an expert who is contradicting Petty and Petty was trying to use him as a defense (to oppose exhumation)," Pittman said.

Petty has met with Dallas County Dist. Atty. Henry Wade several times about the exhumation issue, Petty's secretary Julie Wallace said, but his decision to oppose exhumation was not based on legal advice.